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Dictators Teeter, Manitoba, Ross the Boss, Top Ten and Shernoff — clever new-old rock for the '80s

Punk rock with higher aims

By Philip Elwood

JOHNNY RUBBISH, PUNK-comic, introduced the Dictators last night at the Old Waldorf with a few crude 1968-style jokes. The smallish crowd both guffawed and giggled. If nothing else, he prepared them for the bombast to follow.

The Dictators, a New York City-based new-wave rock quintet, are currently pushing their new record ("Bloodbrothers," on Elektra/Asylum), playing for their staunch fans and, from what I could gather, are anxious to move on into somewhat more sophisticated material.

I mean, how long can you keep screaming, "Baby, Let's Twist," with a hard, eight-beat drum pounding in your ear and electric strings playing so loud as to cauterize the mind and ears?

It is still rather fashionable in the rock press to emote with profundity regarding "punk rock," its socio-political significance and its impact on, among other things, world peace and intergalactic biological transfer.

"Rubbish!," as Johnny would say—the Dictators play their music, with all its old (circa 1966) clichés, because they enjoy it and enjoy equally being in the spotlight and making some good fast bucks.

Manitoba is the mop-headed vocalist. Richie Teeter is the other major singer, and drummer. Rhythm guitarist is Top Ten. Solo guitarist Ross The Boss is also a driving spirit for the band, and bassist Adny Shernoff (also known as Andy Shernoff) completes the group.

Instrumentally, the Dictators aren't as abrasive as most new-wave outfits and their lyrics and arrangements (all written by Shernoff) place the group in a quite superior rock category—although basically gut-level, mainstream, rock 'n' roll, this band could conceivably appeal to anyone who likes good-time music and clever lyrics. And can stand high volume.

Dictators use a straight-eight beat, seldom play long numbers and are as personally electric in projection (and athletic exuberance) as they are instrumentally plugged-in.

Occasionally, they feature rather significant lyrics ("Borneo Jimmy" is an example) and just as often they'll switch rhythms, especially in the six-against-eight beat pattern.

Fully aware of their show-biz stance, Dictators lurch around the stage, posturing and posing, poking fun yet showing great class as instrumental impressionists.

Taken as a mind-blowing experience and as a sample of emancipated punk-rock (let's call their stuff "wave rock"), Dictators provide remarkably interesting entertainment. Their vocal blend is good, and imaginative. With three stringed (and electric) instruments, they have worked out some powerful yet harmonically acceptable orchestrations.

There are a few groups like Dictators around who are moving into a peculiar position int the rock world. On the one hand they are considered revolutionary punks because they are nose-thumbing and current slick, film-oriented, bubble-gum, Top-40 disco-rock. On the other extreme, Dictators are, essentially, going back to where it all began for their idea—there is more of the Who and hard-edged Beatles in Dictators' presentation than you might expect.

So they're moving ahead by looking back—and having a hell of a good time doing it.

Grants to symphonies

Examiner Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Three Bay Area symphony orchestras will receive grants totalling $216,000 in their 1978-79 seasons, the National Endowment for the Arts announced yesterday.

The San Francisco Symphony got California's largest grant — $173,000 to support its school concerts and Symphony Forum — up from $125,000 for the same programs last year.

The San Francisco Chamber Orchestra received $6,000 for its Twilight Concerts, and the Chamber Society got $10,000 to support a school program and concerts for the handicapped.

Oakland's symphony received $20,000 to expand its concert series and support park concerts and a school program. San Jose received $22,000 for similar programs.

Other Northern California orchestras also benefited. Sacramento got $20,000, Monterey $9,500 and Fresno $35,000.

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